



Our Housing Service Standards

Tenants Handbook
HOUSING DIRECTORATE



Housing has a major impact on the quality of people's lives. It influences health, educational achievement, employment opportunities and society in general. The Council is responsible for assessing housing need, and for overseeing and co-ordinating the provision of new housing in the district - especially additional affordable housing for rent. We aim to help prevent homelessness, provide assistance where homelessness cannot be prevented, and support people with special needs. We assist with the improvement of privately owned properties and we provide services for council leaseholders. We also manage and maintain around 6,500 council properties.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the regulator for social housing in England. The TSA's powers came into effect for all social housing providers, including local authorities, from 1 April 2010. A national regulatory framework has been established in collaboration with tenants, local authorities, housing associations and other partners. This is centred on five standards for local authorities. Against each of these standards, the TSA has described the outcomes we should meet, and their specific expectations of us.

The five national standards cover

Tenant involvement and empowerment:

Which contains requirements relating to customer service, choice and complaints; involvement and empowerment; and understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants.

Home:

Which contains requirements relating to the quality of accommodation; and repairs and maintenance.

Tenancy:

Which contains requirements relating to allocations; rent, and tenure.

Neighbourhood and community:

Which contains requirements relating to neighbourhood management; local area co-operation; and anti-social behaviour.

Value for money:

Which contains requirements relating to the the housing provider's approach to managing their resources.

Our Housing Charter and Housing Service Standards set out what we will do, in order to achieve the outcomes expected of us by the TSA. The Standards also give full details of all the services that you can expect to receive from us.

Our Housing Charter

In the provision of housing services (see ) , the Council will:

- Treat you courteously, politely and with respect, in person and on the telephone (and will expect the same in return)
- Investigate complaints thoroughly and respond wherever possible within 10 working days or send you an acknowledgement and then respond to you fully as soon as possible
- Explain and give advice promptly on any housing matters
- Consult you on matters that significantly affect you
- Seek to provide high standards of service to you
- Take into account your needs and the needs of others when considering individual housing cases, and the effect decisions will have
- Keep you informed of housing issues
- Manage the use of your rent payments prudently
- Make provision for any special needs you may have when communicating with you

- Treat you equally in accordance with the Equality Bill 2009 which targets unlawful discrimination in relation to these characteristics:

Age; Disability; Gender reassignment; Marriage and civil partnership; Pregnancy and maternity; Race; Religion or belief; Sex; Sexual orientation


We will also comply with the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Race relations Code of Practice (Housing), and the Good Practice Standards for Social Landlords on Tackling Harassment.

 **Housing services are provided, in the main, to:**

- Council Tenants
- Housing applicants
- Leaseholders
- Homeless applicants
- Private occupiers

General housing standards

We aim to ...

1. Report on our performance against these Service Standards to your Tenants and Leaseholders Federation every year, and review the Standards in the light of performance.
2. Generally satisfy at least 80% of our tenants with the overall housing service provided.
3. Respond to your letters within 10 working days on routine matters, or acknowledge within 5 working days and then provide you with a full response within 28 days on more complex issues.
4. Give you an opportunity to appeal within 3 months to a senior officer about any decision made about your housing that affects you, and then (for certain specified types of appeal) give you a further opportunity within a further 3 months to appeal to the Housing Appeals and Review Panel of district councillors (see ).

5. Give you an opportunity to complain about anything you are unhappy about, fully investigate your complaint and inform you of the outcome of your complaint within the Council's published timescales.
 6. Deliver a copy of the Council's "Housing News" to your home (giving useful information about your housing) at least three times each year.
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B The Housing Appeals and Review Panel will consider appeals on the following issues:

1. All homelessness reviews, with the exception of the following types of reviews that are already only undertaken by officers;
 - (i) whether or not single applicants are "homeless" or have a "priority need";
 - (ii) whether or not an allocation of either temporary or permanent accommodation is suitable for the applicant and his/her family; and
 - (iii) whether or not a homeless applicant should be referred to another local authority, due to their local connection with that local authority;
2. Housing succession cases, where the successor is under-occupying Council accommodation, and has been required to transfer to smaller accommodation;
3. Exclusion of housing applicants from the Housing Register;
4. Non-provision of discretionary home improvement grants;
5. Refusal of requests for disabled adaptations to Council properties requested by the tenant;
6. Refusal to sell Council owned-land under 50 square metres to occupiers for garden use;
7. Refusal of requests from housing applicants for "priority moves" (i.e. those very urgent and rare cases, dealt with outside of the usual Allocations Scheme);

8. disagreements with tenants and former tenants on the level or liability for current or former rent arrears; and
9. The banding of an applicant, in accordance with the Housing Allocations Scheme in being at the time of the decision.

Decisions relating to the priority need of single people, suitability of accommodation and referrals to other councils are considered by a senior officer. All other reviews of homelessness decisions are considered by the Housing Appeals and Review Panel of district councillors. Decisions relating to homelessness have different timescales to those stated in General housing standard 4.

Tenant involvement and empowerment standards


We aim to ...

1. Consult you on any significant matters relating to your tenancy and take your views into account when making decisions.
2. Consult you on major issues that affect your estate (such as improvement schemes) and offer individual choices where appropriate
3. Agree our approach to tenant involvement with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and maintain a written Tenant Participation Agreement which we review every 3 years.
4. Invite 2 representatives of all the recognised tenants associations in the District to become members of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, which will have a written constitution explaining how it will operate.
5. Consult the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on proposed new, or changed, housing plans, strategies and policies, and take their views into account before making decisions.


6. Look for opportunities to form new tenants associations, and support these groups by providing practical or financial support.
7. Provide start-up funding of £100 to any recognised steering group wishing to form a recognised tenants association, and a further grant of £200 when formally recognised.
8. Make premises available for meetings of tenants groups or meet any reasonable costs of hall bookings.
9. Consider the training requirements of tenants and leaseholders who are members of the Federation or other tenants associations, and assist in arranging suitable training.
10. Provide a variety of ways to involve residents, for those that prefer not to attend meetings, including surveys, panels and public events.
11. Review the success of the Council's tenant participation strategy through consultation with the Federation and by conducting a survey once every three years.

Homelessness standards

We aim to ...


1. Give you an interview with a Homelessness Prevention Officer within 7 days of initial contact, or on the same day if an emergency.
2. If necessary, provide you with suitable temporary accommodation, whilst we investigate your homelessness application, until we provide you with a written decision.
3. If requested by you, review a homelessness decision that you are unhappy with (by either a senior officer or the Housing Appeals and Review Panel of district councillors) within 8 weeks (see .

4. Advise you of your right of appeal to the County Court within 21 days on a point of law if you are unhappy with the homelessness decision after it has been reviewed.
5. Keep you in temporary accommodation for at least 3 months after providing you with our written decision. After this time you will be allowed to choose the vacant Council or housing association home you would like to be offered through our HomeOption Scheme. Alternatively you may be provided with accommodation through our Fresh Start Scheme, in which case permanent accommodation will be provided after no more than 3 years.

 Decisions relating to the priority need of single people, suitability of accommodation and referrals to other councils are considered by a senior officer. All others are considered by the Housing Appeals and Review Panel of district councillors.


Housing Register and allocations standards

We aim to ...

1. Register your housing application or garage application, and advise you of the level of priority (band) given, within 10 working days of receipt of all the information we need from you and other people.
2. Notify you in writing of any change in your priority banding, within 7 days of the change being made.
3. Write to you at least every year if you have not expressed any interest in vacant properties under the HomeOption choice based lettings scheme, and ask if you wish to remain on the Housing Register.
4. Give you at least 5 calendar days notice between offering you a tenancy and the tenancy commencement date.
5. Unless you are a homeless applicant (see ) , allow you to choose the vacant Council or housing association home

you would like to be offered (through our HomeOption Scheme), subject to the interest expressed by other applicants with higher priority.


6. If you are not a Council tenant already, offer you an Introductory Tenancy initially, followed by a Secure Tenancy automatically after 1 year, if you have not caused any anti-social behaviour, have had any significant rent arrears or broken any other Conditions of Tenancy.
7. Give you a decision on your request for a mutual exchange within 5 working days of receiving an application from you and the other party or parties, with all the required information provided.


 Homeless applicants will be able to participate in the Choice Based Letting Scheme, for a period of 8 weeks (4 cycles) after receiving their homelessness decision letter. If no successful expressions of interest are made by the applicant, the Council will make the applicant one offer of accommodation when a suitable property becomes available.


Tenancy and neighbourhood standards


We aim to...

1. If you are a new tenant, visit you at home within 10 weeks of your tenancy commencing, to introduce you to your local housing officer and to discuss the main conditions of your tenancy and any queries you may have.
2. Provide you with the following options to pay your rent:
 - At one of the Council's Cash Offices
 - At any post office in the country
 - At any "PayPoint" or other payment outlet
 - By direct debit
 - By standing order

- Through the internet
 - By telephone
 - By text
 - By salary deduction (if you work for the Council)
3. Give you a choice of three dates in the month to pay your rent by direct debit.
 4. Provide you with written confirmation of the balance on your rent account in April or May each year (unless your account is clear or only in credit or arrears by less than £1).
 5. Provide you with a detailed statement of your rent account for the previous 12 months on request (or automatically every three months if you are in arrears by more than £1).
 6. Try to enter into an agreement with you to clear any rent arrears that you have through reasonable instalments, before we take any legal action to recover the arrears.
 7. Try to meet with you to discuss any rent arrears before any court hearing takes place.
 8. If you are an Introductory Tenant or a Demoted Tenant (see ) , give you an opportunity to appeal to a senior officer against any proposed legal action within 2 weeks of you being advised of the proposed legal action.
 9. Remove abandoned vehicles from housing estates (after making enquiries of the DVLA on ownership and contacting the owner) within 5 weeks of receiving a complaint.
 10. Remove clearly abandoned and potentially dangerous vehicles from housing estates within 5 working days of receiving a complaint.
 11. If you live in a flat with more than 4 flats in the block, clean the communal area weekly and re-charge you the cost to the Council.
 12. Where we clean communal areas of blocks or flats, inspect the standard of cleaning at least twice a year.

13. Undertake a formal inspection of your estate by a housing officer and make a note of any required work at least once every year with a representative of any recognised tenant association covering your area.
14. Give you a decision on your request for permission to carry out improvements to your Council home (or former Council home) within 2 weeks of us receiving your request and all the required information.
15. When you vacate your Council home, inform you of your right to compensation for certain improvements you have undertaken within 7 days of you informing us of your vacation and give you a decision on your request for compensation to your Council home within 2 weeks of us receiving your application and all the required information.
16. If you are unable to succeed (see ) to a tenancy because there has already been one succession we will offer you a new tenancy. This could be the property in which you are currently living or, if you are not a spouse and are under-occupying the property, the tenancy of another property.
17. Comply with the Government's Respect Standard for Housing Management in dealing with anti-social behaviour on housing estates.

 A demoted tenant is someone who held a secure tenancy but whose secure tenancy rights have been taken away by a court and has therefore become a demoted tenant - who is allowed to live at the property but with limited rights.

 Succession takes place when someone legally takes over the tenancy from their spouse or parent, following the previous tenant's death. In law, there can only be one succession. A person (spouse or family member) who would otherwise be a successor tenant, but cannot in law because there has already been one succession, will be offered a new tenancy of either the property they are living in or another one.

Home repairs and maintenance standards

We aim to...

1. Continue to ensure that your home meets the Government's Decent Home Standard.
2. Carry out emergency repairs within 24 hours of you reporting the defect.
3. Carry out urgent repairs within 5 working days of you reporting the defect.
4. Carry out routine repairs within 6 weeks of you reporting the defect.
5. Confirm in writing to you the details of any repairs you report, on the day you report the repair (or the next day if reported after Noon), and give you a target date for completion.
6. Keep any appointments that we make for tradesmen to carry out repairs to your home.
7. Satisfy at least 97% of tenants with the general standard of the repairs service we provide (see 🏠).
8. If a repair needs to be inspected first, give you an appointment for a Housing Inspector to visit your home for a morning or afternoon within 10 working days of your request.
9. Arrange for Repairs Inspectors to randomly inspect the quality of work of a sample of repairs carried out by our Building Maintenance Section and contractors.
10. If you are dissatisfied with a repair, arrange for a Supervisor to telephone or visit you within 5 working days of you telling us of your dissatisfaction.
11. If we do not complete certain specified repairs within specific timescales, arrange for another repairs contractor to carry out the repair within the same timescale on request (see 🏠). Note: we must do this by law.

12. If a second contractor does not complete certain specified repairs within specific timescales, pay you compensation of £10 + £2 per day until the repair is carried out (up to a maximum of £50) (see 🏠). Note: we must do this by law.
13. Service all the gas appliances in your home (or undertake a safety check if you have installed the appliance yourself), and provide you with a copy of the associated safety certificate, once a year.
14. Arrange for a gas contractor to visit your home to attend to a gas appliance that is required as an emergency (such as a water or gas leak) within 2 hours.
15. Arrange for a gas contractor to visit your home and carry out a repair to your heating or hot water system (a) Within 24 hours (if during the week, or if you are an older person); or (b) On the following Monday (if reported over the weekend and you are not an older person).
16. Arrange for a gas contractor to visit your home to repair a gas appliance within 5 working days (when a part is required).
17. If you are over 60 years of age and live in a 1 or 2 bed property, redecorate 1 room in your home, on request, every 5 years and within 13 weeks of your request.

🏠 Measured through our ongoing repairs satisfaction survey from satisfaction forms provided to tenants for all repairs requested.

🏠 Under the Right to Repair legislation, defined repairs must be undertaken within either 1, 3 or 7 days as specified by the legislation.

Disabled adaptations standards

We aim to...

1. Advise you in writing about whether or not you are eligible for specific adaptations to your Council home within one week of us receiving a request from the Occupational Therapy Service.
2. Carry out minor adaptations to your home within 4 weeks of receiving details of the required work from the Occupational Therapy Service.
3. Carry out non-minor adaptations to your home within 13 weeks of receiving details of the required work from the Occupational Therapy Service.

Sheltered housing and Careline standards

We aim to...

1. Test your Careline alarm in sheltered accommodation every 3 months and in non-sheltered accommodation every 6 months.
2. Install: (a) 90% of urgent basic telecare packages within 2 working days and 100% within 5 working days; and (b) 100% of non-urgent telecare packages within 15 working days.
3. Renew mains batteries in individual (dispersed) alarms every 5 years.
4. Treat all your alarm calls to Careline as potential emergencies until proven otherwise.
5. Answer alarm calls to Careline, on average, within 10 seconds. Answer 99% of all alarm calls to Careline within 60 seconds.
6. Liaise with other agencies and nominated contacts to ensure the wellbeing of our Careline customers.
7. Record and monitor all your calls to Careline, to help train our staff to look at how we can improve our service.

8. (a) Repair 90% of critical faults to telecare equipment within 2 working days, and 100% within 4 working days. (b) Repair 100% of non-urgent faults to telecare equipment within 15 working days
9. Visit you annually to test the back-up batteries in your Careline alarm and to review your personal details held on our records.
10. Record, maintain and update your Careline records in a confidential and secure manner.
11. If you live in sheltered accommodation, ensure that your Scheme Manager gives you a home visit (or accounts for you) every day (Monday to Friday – subject to holidays and sickness).
12. If you live in sheltered accommodation and your Scheme Manager is on holiday or sick, arrange for another Scheme Manager to visit you 3 times a week.
13. If you do not live in sheltered accommodation, but are visited by a Scheme Manager, ensure that you receive a visit every week, fortnight or month, as appropriate (as determined by a risk assessment).
14. If you live in sheltered or non-sheltered accommodation for older people, provide you with a Tenant Support Plan – explaining the type and level of support that we will give you - and review the Tenant Support Plan every 12 months (or sooner if requested by you).
15. Carry out fire drills at sheltered accommodation every 3 months.

Right to buy standards


We aim to...

1. Confirm whether or not you are eligible for the Right to Buy within 2 weeks of receiving a properly completed application from you. Note: The law says we must do this within 4 weeks.


2. Advise you of the valuation, discount and purchase price for the property you wish to purchase within 8 weeks of us confirming the Right to Buy if your property is a house or bungalow, or 12 weeks if your property is a flat or maisonette. Note: we must do this by law.
3. Give you an opportunity to appeal against our valuation of your home, and to obtain an independent valuation (free of charge) from the District Valuer, within 3 months of you receiving our valuation. Note: we must do this by law.
4. Complete the purchase of your property within 10 weeks of you confirming that you wish to proceed, provided that you and your solicitor deal with all required matters promptly.
5. If you do not proceed with your purchase, give you two formal notices of 8 weeks each before cancelling your Right to Buy application. Note: we must do this by law.

Leasehold services standards

We aim to...

1. Provide you with a detailed breakdown of your estimated annual service charge at least 30 days before the beginning of the financial year.
2. Provide you with a detailed breakdown of your actual annual service charge within 6 months after the end of the financial year.
3. If you fall into arrears with your actual service charge, give you an appropriate amount of time to clear the arrear in accordance with the Council's Sundry Income and Debt Policy (see ) .
4. Consult you on proposed major repairs and improvements (over £250) and give you the opportunity to nominate a contractor to provide a tender for the work at least 30 days before seeking tenders. Note: we must do this by law.

5. Consult you on the estimated cost of major repairs and improvements and advise you of the selected contractor before commencing the work. Also give you at least 30 days to provide any comments you may have, which we will take into account. Note: we must do this by law.
 6. Provide you, on request, with a copy of your current service charge account and other relevant information (perhaps if you wish to sell on the leasehold), for a fee, within 2 weeks of your request.
 7. Support a District-wide Leaseholders Association and ensure that it meets at least 4 times each year.
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 Under the Council's Sundry Income and Debt Policy, people are given the following time periods to repay the following levels of debts:

Debts below £500 – Upto 3 months

Debts below £1,500 – Upto 6 months

Debts below £2,500 – Upto 9 months

Debts above £2,500 – Upto 12 months

Equal opportunities policy in the provision of housing services

Policy statement:

Epping Forest District Council is committed to equal opportunities in the provision and quality of its housing services. The Council will seek to ensure that no housing applicant, tenant, leaseholder or licensee receives less favourable treatment, in accordance with the Equality Bill 2009, and will comply with the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Race Relations Code of Practice (Housing).

Race relations:

The Council has formally adopted the Race Relations Code of Practice (Housing) and will implement the provisions of the Code as far as practicable. A copy is available for inspection on request.

The Council will abide by the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended in 2000 and 2003).

Publicity:

The Council will take steps to advise housing applicants and tenants of its Policy Statement by including the Statement in the Tenants Handbook and in leaflets accompanying the issue of housing application forms

Training:

All staff involved with the provision of housing services will be given a copy of this policy document and will be made aware of the Code of Practice.

All Housing Managers involved with the provision of housing services will be given a copy of the Code of Practice for reference.

Racial harassment:

The Council will investigate any complaints of racial harassment involving Council tenants and, where proven, will take appropriate action.

Ethnicity recording and monitoring:

The Council will monitor the ethnic origin of:

- (a) applicants registering for housing, and
- (b) applicants allocated housing

as an aid to ensuring that applicants are not discriminated against on the grounds of race.

Review:

The practices and procedures of the housing service will be monitored by the Director of Housing to ensure that they do not discriminate directly or indirectly. Changes will be made if it is established that practices or procedures may be contravening the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended in 2000 and 2003).

Further information

If you feel we have not met the terms of our Housing Charter or our Housing Service Standards, please write to us to tell us what is wrong:

Housing Register, lettings and homelessness:

Housing Options Manager, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping
CM16 4BZ

Housing management

Area Housing Manager (South), 63 The Broadway, Loughton
IG10 3SP

Area Housing Manager (North), Civic Offices, High Street,
Epping CM16 4BZ

Repairs

Housing Repairs Manager, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping
CM16 4BZ

Maintenance, improvements and disabled adaptations

Housing Assets Manager, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping
CM16 4BZ

Sheltered Housing and Careline

Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services), 2 Parsonage
Court, Loughton IG10 2BB

House sales and leasehold

Housing Resources Manager, Civic Offices, High Street,
Epping CM16 4BZ

General housing services

Information and Strategy Team, Civic Offices, High Street,
Epping CM16 4BZ

Please phone 01992 564292 if you would like this information provided in any other way, as a large print version for example.

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